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Having been in New York for 61 days, the Russian immigrant named Vassili Breeff thought he had America figured out. The big difference between Manhattan and Moscow, Breeff decided, was money. Freedom, he reasoned, was a pocketful of cash and a department store stocked with anything you might desire. In Moscow, Breeff once waited three months for a pair of shoes that cost him a week's salary. At Macy's all he had to do was walk in and pick up what he wanted.

Then, as he boarded an IRT train this week, a man in a gray overcoat handed Breeff a copy of a newspaper entitled the Independent Citizen. Squeezing into a seat, Breeff opened the newspaper and started to read. By the next subway stop, Breeff had decided that there was more to this concept called freedom than he had imagined.

On the front page was a picture of the man who had handed Breeff the newspaper. The caption identified the man as Arthur Johnson, an expert in law, nutrition, herbology, German and American history, political science and urban ecology. Johnson, Breeff learned, is able to read Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese and can get by in Arabic, Greek, Japanese, Korean, Polish-Ukrainian and Swahili.

MOVING ON TO THE LEAD ARTICLE, Breeff read that Johnson is also "the man the CIA could not snare, bribe, hire or kill." For some time, the article reported, the CIA had been bombarding Johnson's studio apartment on W. 22d St. with microwaves. Johnson fended off this attack by lining his room with tin foil.

Later, the article related, the agency tampered with one of four gallon bottles of cider vinegar Johnson purchased at a local supermarket. The article then described an experiment whereby Johnson injected a mouse with vinegar from the suspect bottle.

"The test mouse remained motionless for several long minutes," Breeff read.

Glancing at the newspaper's masthead, Breeff learned that the Independent Citizen is distributed in New York and Bristol, Pa. The "Publisher, Editor-in-Chief and No. 1 Delivery Boy" is none other than Arthur Johnson.

Turning to Page 2, Breeff read an interview of Arthur Johnson by Arthur Johnson.

"I just want people to leave me alone," Johnson announced.

IN THE NEXT TWO PAGES, Breeff learned about Johnson's 13½-by-18-foot apartment. Breeff stared for several minutes at the photograph of the toilet Johnson built for his cat.

"The cat privy, constructed from lumber scraps, is indispensable for holding down the odor," the caption informed Breeff. "It is cleaned daily, sometimes twice."

IN 1976, BREEFF READ, Johnson launched an acting career. He snared a four-line part in a movie called "The Last Rebel" and a spot as an extra in an Italian movie called "Meo Patacca." According to the article, Johnson abandoned dramatics when he was edged out by Hal Holbrook for the lead in a six-part television series on Abraham Lincoln.

Skimming an account of Johnson's Vitamin-E cure for varicose veins and feline leukemia, Breeff moved on to a column entitled "A.J. — Not Just Another Pretty Face."

In this column, Johnson suggested that the only solution to rat infestation is the mobilization of the United States Army.

"Form specially trained rat squads armed with .22-caliber rifles and small-bore shotguns, infrared night scopes, floodlights and prefabricated sections of clear plastic that can be assembled to screen off a target area and contain any wayward bullets or pellets," Breeff read.

THE FINAL TWO PAGES of the Independent Citizen contained a series of classified advertisements. Arthur Johnson needs a ride to Washington. Arthur Johnson hereby pledges not to write a book about his dealings with the CIA unless he is presented with a petition containing 100,000 signatures and is guaranteed a fair share of the royalties. Arthur Johnson, for the sum of "one dollar American cash or its equivalent," offers "his services as a speaker, the topic of discussion to be 'The Future of Democracy in America.'" For the sum of \$5, Arthur Johnson offers a cassette in which a CIA agent "confirms having deliberately infected him with gonorrhea and other sordid details."

Folding his copy of the Independent Citizen, Breeff got off the train at Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn. He went straight to the Berkely Place apartment of an American friend.

"I do not understand this," Breeff said. "How can such a newspaper be allowed?"

"Because Arthur Johnson wanted to print it," the American friend said.

"Because he wants, he can do?" Breeff asked.

"As long as he doesn't hurt anybody," the friend said.

"Arthur Johnson would be in prison in Russia," Breeff said. "In Russia, you do what they want."